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## Recognizing the Significant Role of Literature in Teaching College English

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### Abstract

Purely based on my experiential knowledge, this article does not engage with the current so-called “academic” scholarship on the topic. It does not present, according to a critic, “empirically-focused and data-driven research” as the majority of traditional writing studies normally do nor does it “approach and theorize writing as a multidimensional practice and object of study” following what is known as a so-called “methodical analysis.” Free from and unpopulated by unnecessarily top-heavy “academic” and “educational” jargons, this new and original experience-based article, that boasts in not being academically derivative and adulterated, argues that College English (or freshman composition) should be as much literaturebased as it is currently based on other writing mechanics related to technology and social media, and practiced through what sometimes seems to be only elaborately and long drawn out steps in the writing process with the assessment criteria impractically divided into minor as well as minute differences. The course should be more open and flexible in its syllabus and be taught with a reading of suitable literary materials as a major component and

literaturebased writing exercises, among, of course, the other interesting topics of contemporary culture.

Based on my recent experience of teaching composition at a college in Canada, there appears to be no literary component in College English as it is taught there (and probably in the country today). This course seems to be entirely directed (I would deliberately refrain from using the words “devoted” or “dedicated”) to teaching writing and rhetoric as conceived in terms of the so-called tightly “structured” (so reductive, if not redundant) educational context. Education as a discipline, I think (I hope I’m wrong), is a narrow pursuit, if not completely dull and dry, doing not that much great good to the learners, in fact, blocking and clogging their creative spirit rather than letting it fly and flower with fun in an open and expansive way. Barring some interesting areas, of course, the discipline of education is, generally, probably far from catering to students’ productive needs and providing them with a useful service (again I hope I’m wrong). Only literature (and the related fields of cultural studies) can fill the vacuum and unleash the potential of the learners to the fullest not only to their own benefit but also to the greater interest of the society. I believe in literature -- living and lasting, and diverse and dynamic as it is--, not, however, in stagnant educational miniature, diminutive, and staccato scholarship.

At present College English is totally devoid of any literary content that may probably be more profitable to the young college learners. Shouldn’t discussing simple and suitable literary subjects/topics as they arise in context be a significant part of the presentation and delivery of the course? Shouldn’t writing be also based on reading literary works and discussing various themes and elements of style, thereby giving a considerable importance to literature in writing classes? Shouldn’t the English department policy/approach in this regard be more open and flexible in terms of the teaching materials depending on the well-qualified instructors’

individual choice and freedom so that they can give their best to their students with passion, knowledge, and confidence? Rather than being strictly prescriptive (in the name of being “uniform and standardized”), that is often found to be limited and restrictive, a college level composition course, while having some core or fundamental elements in common with what may be accepted as a standard (so-called standardized?) syllabus, should be as benefiting and rewarding as possible to all stake holders.

Can a writing course be designed and methodized without being narrowly mechanical and mechanized in an atomistic or elementary/secondary school-*ish* way? Should applied arts mean forced attention to minute and mechanized grading details (which, all together, are, strangely enough, longer than a student essay and which I’m sure remain ignored by many instructors)? How can an instructor apply those little details of evaluation to what is only a short student essay in the range of 700-1200 words only? Why to miss the beauty of a whole wood for what may or may not be there in the form of small trees and plants or undergrowth in the wood? If Robert Frost doesn’t (“Stopping by woods on a snowy evening”), why should his young readers, rhetorically speaking? Isn’t grading and assessment ultimately a very subjective matter that’s supposed to be left to the judicious discretion of the discriminating instructor based on the overall merit/quality of only 2-p student assignments in terms of the three major requirements of content, organization, and language/grammar? Any further break down of the evaluation of a short assignment into impractical smaller details should be considered not only unnecessary but also negligible, to the detriment of the best service available from the teachers to their students.

To repeat a little more, those three major requirements are just fine, no quarrel with them. But when they’re further broken down into more and more sub-and-mini categories to constitute an unnecessarily elaborate rubric, as long as a student essay, I feel like raising my eyebrows.

Why should a course like College English be narrowly designed and devised by only those from the minutely mechanizing discipline of education, and not others from the larger and broader fields of liberal arts, especially literature that is full of rhetorical tools and techniques necessary for effective reading and writing? While education programs are important, but only to some extent, maybe, it's a common consent that literature in its numerous genres (fiction, poetry, nonfiction, auto/biography, essay, travel writing, nature writing, contemporary culture writing) illustrates and exemplifies the best, liveliest, and most creatively communicative forms of language in motion. A literary text is complete not only with a rhetorically beautiful variety of sentences (simple, compound, and complex), introductory phrases, appositives, and parallelisms, but also different styles of writing--description, narration, classification, comparison and contrast, and argument and persuasion.

In fact, it's the hair-splitting "educational" nitty-gritties that are at best of modest to moderate value that is of lighter balance compared with the heavier side weighing writing studies through literature and the literary arts. Although there is a romantic beauty of the particular, here in the case of short and simple student essays, I'd like to apply the theory of and be an advocate of the English enlightenment writer Dr Samuel Johnson. Through his poetphilosopher Imlac in his most famous and popular work, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* (1759), Johnson thinks that in a wide survey what is important is to watch and observe the general, not really the particular:

The business of a [writer], said Imlac, is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances: he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features, as recall the original to

every mind; and must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked, and another have neglected, for those characteristics which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness.<sup>1</sup>

In light of the above and what follows, members of the academic administration and establishment may reconsider the existing design and structure of College English/freshman composition syllabus for the greater interest of their first-year students, who're likely to be more motivated and thereby reap more benefits from a refined and comprehensive overhaul of this essential course.

The above questions may be confused either as a paradox or an oxymoron or both. More than being dramatic and rhetorical, they're in fact very serious questions that I take the opportunity to raise out of my experience of teaching the course at a Canadian college in the fall of 2018. The answers, while being obvious and already known to be "Yes, indeed," "Of course,"

"Certainly, it can be," and "Sure, it should be," also demand further clarification and argumentation in terms of the syllabus of the course in question. Despite the fact that the textbook for the course—*Strategies for Successful Writing* by Reinking, von der Osten, and Cairns (6<sup>th</sup> Canadian edition/Pearson) -- is full of literary quotations and passages—narrative, descriptive, personal experience—from many writers—Homer, Shakespeare, Milton, Donne, Dickens, T H Huxley, John Stuart Mill, Henry David Thoreau, Mark Twain, Orwell, Michael Ondaatje, Margaret Atwood, Robertson Davies, among others, and that the textbook does in fact contain a chapter on figurative language consisting of similes, metaphors, personification, irony, overstatement, understatement, and then clichés, euphemisms, induction, deduction,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Texts/rasselas-selection.html>. While Johnson's original is "poet", I put "writer" and so it is in parenthesis.

connotation, enotation, and so on, I was advised by the Department Chair, who had an education background, not to discuss any literary matters, which s/he thought were inappropriate and uncalled for in a class of rhetoric and writing; if at all, discussions of a literary nature had to be minimal. In view of the Department's general approach that literature be very limited in a composition class, I was advised that the course be conducted through the other forms of writing--essays and articles of contemporary communication and cultural interest (e.g., business, technology, economy, employment, consumerism, social media, sports, video games, music, entertainment, modern media icons, environment, Greenpeace, climate change, nuclear energy, and online/distance education) that were there in the book or that could also be imported from other (outside) sources.

I had absolutely no problem in piloting the course through the kinds of materials available in the prescribed textbook. In fact, I found many of them highly interesting, full of useful information that are necessary for all students and faculty to know in modern times. I loved to read many of the pieces included in the book—all rhetorically rich and communicative, as winning and appealing as the great old and new classics in literary art—in all genres of prose and poetry, drama, fiction, and nonfiction.

However, interestingly, the essays and articles that are included in the course book are interspersed with literary references for the purpose of writing skill and rhetorical effect. For example, the whole of the two comparative essays in the book, “Zero to Hero: A Comparative Analysis of Heroism in *The Odyssey* and [the Newbery award winning children's novel] *Tale of Despereaux*” by Alex McIlwain and “What do you see? Is your brain East or West?” by Ian Bullock entirely rests on Homer's conception of “a unique and strong” Greek/Western individual as exemplified by his epic hero Odysseus. Alternative lifestyles of satisfaction with either more or less, that is, a more ambitious life or a simpler one, are illustrated through a

comparison and contrast paragraph (p. 90) in Thoreau's *Walden*—a work devoted to describing a personal experience, rather experiment in a rural setting away from the abundance and affluence of city life. The history of local food movements also is traced, in Tamsin McMahon's article "Is Local

Food Bad for the Economy?" (p. 299), to "the romantic idealism of living off the land" by Thoreau as described in his *Walden*. There is a summary writing exercise passage from John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* and there is an analogy in an argument passage from T H Huxley's "A Liberal Education and Where to Find It" in which a liberal education, said to be "the best kind to help us cope successfully with life," is defined as "learning the rules of this mighty game"—the game of the laws of Nature and the phenomena of the Universe, the world being like a chessboard.

In the selection, "The sweet smell of success isn't all that sweet," that is given in the (Canadian) 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the textbook (p. 212), Laurence Shames is critical of the modern idea of success as settling for less in a safe and secure but limited and restricted way—"the rather brittle species of success now in fashion [...] a chokingly narrow swath of turf along the entire range of human possibilities." He laments that "Under the flag of success, modern-style, liberal arts colleges are withering while business schools are burgeoning." In his work, *The Hunger for More*, Shames looks for values in a world of greed, narcissism, and materialist pursuit of pleasure. He begins "The sweet smell" selection by alluding to Milton, Socrates, and Beethoven, who, in his view, were all great failures, paradoxically/oxymoronicly, at their monumental goals and aims: "The inescapable conclusion seems to be that the surest, noblest way to fail is to set one's own standards titanicly high [...] something noble enough to be worth failing at."



Would it be wrong on the part of the instructor to further illustrate Shames' notion of high standard success -- "The sweet smell of success isn't all that sweet" -- with the help of Emily Dickinson's poem, "Success is counted sweetest/By those who ne'er succeed./To comprehend a nectar/Requires sorest need"? There is an excerpt, on p. 94 (5<sup>th</sup> ed. 93), from an address about Canadian literature in which the speaker, Canadian novelist Robertson Davies, makes a psychological comparison and contrast between Canada and the USA as "as very much an introverted country" and "the most extroverted country known to history" respectively. The excerpt is given as an illustration of coherence through the mixed use of nouns and their pronoun references to avoid monotony and improve clarity in writing. Would it then be wrong to ask students to write a comparison and contrast essay about two short works of Canadian and American literature?

Would it be wrong to explain the concept of a simple lifestyle to young and midlife writing students with the help of the famous poem "Ode on Solitude" (also known as "Happy the Man") by the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Augustan English poet Alexander Pope? In light of buying things more than necessary but for fun, fashion, and emotional liking, Candace Fertile quotes Shakespeare in her illustrative essay "The Oldest Profession: Shopping" (5<sup>th</sup> ed. P. 153). Would it then be wrong to explain to students the context of King Lear's "Oh, reason not the need" and ask students to write a comment on Lear's royal needs and the needs of the ordinary? In a footnote, Fertile herself provides the context of Lear's emotional need of keeping a group of about 100 loyal retainers even after he gives away his kingdom and kingship. When (in Act 2, Scene 4) he is challenged by his two eldest daughters, as ungrateful as they are, about the large number of his retainers, Lear protests by saying that "for human life to have value, humans need more than the basics of survival." Would it be foolish to mention Shakespeare's wise but funny fools or clowns in regards to Kristine Nyhout's cause and effect article "Send in the clowns"

(pp. 192-193) that is about the physical and emotional benefits of laughter or the lighter side of life?

Would it be wrong to briefly dwell on what Pip's (David Copperfield's) great expectations were when there is a descriptive-narrative scene from Dickens's novel of that name in the textbook (pp. 117-118) as an example of first-person personal writing and asking students to do an autobiographical piece of writing of their own?

Would it be a red herring ("ignoring the question"/"arguing off the point") to try to generate more interest in the environmental and Greenpeace writings of which there are so many in the textbook by way of mentioning, "God made the country, and man made the town," as said in the long narrative-descriptive poem *The Task* by the 18<sup>th</sup> century English poet William Cowper, a precursor/forerunner of English Romanticism? Would it be a non sequitur ("it does not follow") if a reading of Chris Wood's essay, "Dry Spring: The Coming Water Crisis of North America" (pp. 194-197 of the textbook), that begins with the importance of water as stressed in different religions such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism, is made more interesting by the instructor providing a reference to "Water, water, everywhere,/And all the boards did shrink;/Water, water, everywhere,/Nor any drop to drink," from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, one of the major English Romantic poets, the poem itself illustrating and ending with a religious moral lesson? The critical passage about the folk fairytale, "Little Red Riding Hood" (p. 98, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. 97), a tale of "a dramatic confrontation between an innocent little girl and a wicked talking wolf with a big appetite," references other such children's tales of Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, and Snow White that have of course their own differences in terms of royalty, enchantment, and romance. Would then it be a detraction/deviation or wouldn't it be a useful illustration and exposition to talk about these classic folk and fairy tales in some details, including the delightful age-old

nursery rhymes whose meanings, often tragic, are buried in history? Would it be unwise to even ask students to do some research and write an essay on such rhymes and stories?

I'm an American-educated new immigrant in Canada with an MA and a PhD, both in literature, from two different and distinguished American universities, with decades of teaching experience abroad, and with numerous publications in books and articles, not to mention my South Asian undergraduate studies, also in literature, that earned me a United States government Fulbright scholarship back back in the fall of 1984. I believe that literature in its variety of forms and genres is one of the best and most effective ways to teach writing and rhetoric. It's literature that uses the important devices of the two points of view in narration -- first person/limited point of view and third person/omniscient point of view--in addition to a number of other skills and styles of classification, illustration, comparison and contrast, and argument and persuasion. Apart from the writings of real life interests, it is also literature in its creative forms, including essays, letters, auto/biographies, fiction, and nonfiction, that uses, in a lively manner, the tools and means of logos (rational appeals), pathos (emotional appeals), ethos (ethical and moral appeals), qualifiers to strengthen the credibility of an argument, proper transitions, different kinds of tenses and sentences, organization into introduction, body, and conclusion, all demonstrating and thus helping to develop the art of rhetorical transaction and communication.

As my first job in Canada, where the job market is pretty tight, I was teaching a beginner's writing class, which I rarely did in the past. Also, for the first time I was teaching with a technology-based component at which I was only a novice. As everything was new to me, I got lost as I was trying to navigate through dozens of sites and links to get to know the system. I was also kind of dazed, if not daunted, to find that students were obliged neither to purchase the textbook nor to attend the class regularly nor to remain in class for the entire

duration of a threehour class, from the beginning to the end, although they were given one or two short breaks. They used to come in and go out as they liked during any time of the class with the exception of a few being regular in attendance and participation. The majority of students took advantage of (1) the period being too long, so they chose to trickle in and get out as they wished; (2) there being, unlike many other cultures and countries, absolutely no reward or obligation for attendance and participation in discussion and there being no penalty whatsoever for remaining absent from class after class; (3) the only requirement for the grade being submission of assignments and taking only one or two in-class exams, all due on different dates and all together comprising the required total of 100 marks; and (4) the subject matter being no more than only the basic writing skills which they may have found dull and boring and below their level.

The course didn't seem to be one of as great an interest to students as the other courses in which they were majoring (business, marketing, finance, accounting), although this College English also was a credit-bearing course but still taken, it appeared, for the sake of its being a mandatory course, not out of students' free choice or motivation, as it is or could be the case with their majors. Regarding the students not being required to attend the class and not having to pay any price for remaining absent even for the whole semester, they could then choose to go online in another instructor's virtual classroom rather than join an on-site class, without having to profitably enjoy face-to-face interaction and direct exchange of views, and without the pleasure of getting to know each other, sitting in an ergonomic classroom with peers, and having meaningful eye contact and body language communication generating a significant degree of interest and motivation.

Early on in the semester, I made it obligatory, with the intention of having the students attend class regularly, that they would have to take detailed notes about what was being

facilitated and discussed in every weekly class, and submit their class notes organized into a portfolio at the end of the semester that would be worth 15% of the grade. I believe this requirement was going down well as I noticed a better attendance and a more seriousness from them. When the Department came to know about this four weeks later, the Chair did not approve of it on the pretext that it was not on the syllabus that I found to be too mechanical and complicated. Naturally, I had to apologize to my students, replacing the said class notes portfolio with an easy home assignment. Towards the end of the term, some students commented that the portfolio requirement that I introduced at the beginning was indeed a smart thing to make (if not force) students to be pretty regular in class.

Naturally, it wasn't fun for me to teach such a class, especially when there was no textbook in front of students for them to quickly and conveniently refer to, except for only two or three students in a class of forty (indeed a large number for a writing class that should not be more than twenty max), there being no online copy of the textbook. One student had an old (5<sup>th</sup>) edition and he needed to be helped by me to find the passage or the essay under discussion as he was flipping and floundering through the pages. That also happened on the day when I was explaining the term "oxymoron" that (although commonly used in today's everyday speech as a persuasive tool, especially on the media and political programs) students hardly knew or heard. I was talking about the term—"a rhetorical device that uses an ostensible self-contradiction to illustrate a rhetorical point or to reveal a paradox"—because it literally occurred there at the beginning of the article we as a class were then taking a look at—"Teen Angst, RIP" by Adam Sternbergh.

The article is about the teen worries and anxieties of the writer's generation as compared with the teen fears and depression of the present generation, despite the fact that the present-day adolescents, according to Statistics Canada, were very happy enjoying financial solvency, good

medical care, and technological advancement. The article opens with two rhetorical and dramatic questions: If you were a teen, how could you be happy or not happy for that matter? If you were happy, how could you be a teen or not a teen? To quote Sternbergh directly:

Are you happy? Are you a teenager? These two questions might seem contradictory, even oxymoronic. For, as we all know, teenagers aren't happy. They're sullen, moody, impulsive, dramatic, pimply, gangly, and wracked with angst. They mope, wear black, write bad poetry, and doodle dark thoughts on their binders.

The last paragraph of the article began with another oxymoron, "this wasteland of teen age happiness..."

In the middle of his anti-multiculturalism essay, "No Place Like Home," that is there in the same textbook (pp. 304-308), Neil Bissoondath writes, using a beautiful oxymoron: "The immigrant dream—of financial and social success; of carving out a place within the larger society—is *grand in its simplicity*" (my emphasis). A well-known paragraph in the same textbook from Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" contains a similar phrase: "devilishly loud roar of glee." The same students would every day hear the phrases of "pretty ugly" or "jumbo shrimp" as they would also see the food outlets or coffee shops down the street, called "Devilishly Tasty," "Devilishly Good, and the alliterative "Devilishly Delicious." Armed with a long literature background both in academic training and the teaching profession, I was explaining Sternbergh's use of the term with more references to memorable oxymorons/oxymora in literature, such as Thomas Gray's "noble rage" (his *Elegy*), Blake's "fearful symmetry" ("The Tyger"), Yeats's "terrible beauty" (Easter 1916"), and Milton's "fortunate fall" (*Paradise Lost*) in the context of their appearance in the poems by them.

After all, instructors should not be bound by the confines of a textbook and ought to go beyond to promote an intellectual culture of liberal arts in order to free the minds of the young seekers of knowledge the way ancient Athenians did through the curriculum of the trivium—grammar, logic, and rhetoric—and, to a lesser extent, the quadrivium—arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. I could sense that my students were listening with interest and attention as if they thought this College English course was worth their while, rewarding, providing them with great ideas to critically think about and work on. Unfortunately, the Chair didn't take it the way I or my students did and it followed that s/he put an embargo on discussing literary references, even though that was one of the lasting and living ways to go about reading and writing skills along with the attendant/accompanying rhetorical communication and transaction.

Regardless of whether it's freshman composition, rhetoric and composition, or research and composition as part of general studies and communication program, shouldn't College English be mainly reading-and-discussion-based, in addition to being a trite, routine writing course? Teaching College English materials in a literary mould or frame would appear to involve everything that is called writing, rhetoric, and research together. As mentioned early on, figurative language, personification, simile and metaphor, irony, overstatement, understatement, oxymoron, questions, quotations, dialogues, telling details, first or third person narration, all that are needed to develop effective writing skills to argue, convince, and persuade others are there in the textbook.

But these rhetorical strategies could also be learnt as effectively as expected through reading the works of literature that are referred to in the same textbook. Just as narration and description go together, one being impossible without the other, reading and writing also go together, one being inseparable from the other. There cannot be any reading without writing; there cannot be any writing without reading. In fact, reading comes first, it precedes writing, so

that writing is to be learnt and its techniques are to be derived and developed by doing different kinds of readings in various genres. Writing improves not only through regularly done writing practices but also reading in plenty. To talk about writing before free reading or close and careful reading is to ask one to run before they learn how to walk, or to put the cart before the horse. It is the same with the College English course I taught in which students were hardly required to read and discuss anything but, instead, were being asked to do a few writing exercises and submit a few short essays on the familiar topics of their choice. Who knows if they submitted (or did not submit) the same or similar essays in other courses as well?

Coming back to the literary focus or flavor that is being advocated for a writing/composition course in this article, literary discussions apparently interest students as much as the topics related to modern culture. A combination of both helps them to acquire language-related processes and techniques better than just those related to business and technology, which should not be out of the trail or thread anyway and should indeed be treated with due attention. However, students need to come to class to find it lively and motivating, and inspiring and uplifting, so that they feel energized towards the goal of their better and higher performance at work or in the numerous phases of their both public and private life. Otherwise, they would come to class only to find it like the environs of Ferdinand dragging large blocks of log painfully watched by Miranda with her tearful eyes, to be rescued through the good intention and magical power of the overseeing godlike Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Students should not find the classroom situation as dull and drab, boring and routine, as T S Eliot's Prufrock finds modern life and culture during WWI—

Streets that follow like a tedious argument

Of insidious intent...



In the room the women come and go  
Talking of Michelangelo.  
For I have known them all already, known them all:  
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,  
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons; ...  
And I have known the eyes already, known them all—  
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,  
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,  
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,  
And I have known the arms already, known them all—

My students did their assignments about many interesting and useful topics related to modern life, culture, and society. They chose from the list of business, technology, and communication topics provided to them. I enjoyed reading and grading their papers. However, despite the fact that literature hardly received any attention because that was the Chair's clear direction/instruction, a few students wrote their comparison and contrast assignments on the short stories they read or the film adaptation of a literary work they watched or the limit that an artist or a film director should have to their freedom in the name of art considering family and religious values. One day the topic of our discussion in class was the narrative-descriptive style. Among the other examples were Orwell's vivid description of shooting an elephant in colonial Burma/Myanmar (5<sup>th</sup> ed. P. 120); Mark Twain's living description of his boyhood farmland with its host of big and small natural objects, both living and non-living (5<sup>th</sup> ed. pp. 123-124); Margaret Atwood's "lovely and windless evening" passage from her *Alias Grace* (p. 119); and an excellent student paragraph about a green field containing similes and metaphors (p. 112).

One of my “older” students was so happy and inspired by these literary works that she forwarded a most beautiful but pretty long poem, called “David” by Earle Birney (1904-1995), to all her classmates the very same evening (<https://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poems/david>).

“David,” a poem of tragic death amid the countless minute natural particulars (of trees, plants, birds, animals, shrubs, vegetation, earth, air, sky, mists, clouds, weather, valleys, lakes, fishes, the sun, the moon, mornings, afternoons, twilight, and evenings) is set in the Canadian Rockies with the vast prospect of the prairies around. Just as an epic hero is described with a long descriptive epic epithet each time he appears in the long epic poem, each aspect or object of nature in “David” is mentioned with wonderfully coined and sensuously appealing pictorial phrases and transitive/intransitive verbs.<sup>2</sup> I was delighted to send my student my comment the next day: Hi [...], thanks for sharing this great green poem, which is also about the character David's tragic fall to death while climbing to a mountain peak, together with his surviving friend, the poet himself. On the one hand, it is a poem of sublime and awesome natural beauty described in abundant, yet selected particulars; on the other, it is about a fellow mountaineering friend's slow death caused by his 50 ft. deep fall. Moment by moment description of the two Friends' climbing of mountain after mountain until the tragic fall of one of them in the midst of vast natural surroundings is amazing, reminding us of the passages and paragraphs by Orwell, Twain, and Atwood that we read in class yesterday. The poem in its green details minus its

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<sup>2</sup> For example, “long green surf of juniper flowing,” “darkening firs,” “fern-hidden cliffs,” “the cold/Pines thrust at the stars,” “The dawn was a floating/ Of mists till we reached to the slopes above timber,” “The peak was upthrust/Like a fist in a frozen ocean of rock that swirled/Into valleys the moon could be rolled in,” “Remotely unfurling/Eastward the alien prairie glittered,” “scroll of coral in limestone/And the beetle-seal in the shale of ghostly trilobites,/ Letters delivered to man from the Cambrian waves,” “a robin gyrating/In grass, wing-broken. I caught it to tame but David/Took and killed it, and said, ‘Could you teach it to fly?’” “By the forks of the Spray we caught five trout and fried them/Over a balsam fire,” “The woods were alive/ With the vaulting of mule-deer and drenched with clouds all the morning, cold/Breath of the glacier, surging bloom/Of incredible dawn in the Rockies,” “curling lake,” “bottle-green lake,” “the hurrying slant of the sunset,” “air that was steeped/In the wail of mosquitoes,” “splayed white ribs/Of a mountain goat,” “silken feathers of kites,” and “Picking sunhot raspberries.”

tragic side is also strikingly similar to Fiona Macleod's (a female pseudonym of the Scottish nature writer William Sharp) beautiful, environmentally-aware New Year essay, "At the Turn of the Year," one of its rare kind, that appeared in his collection of nature writings called *Where the Forest Murmurs* (1906) that I once read with my students in the Middle East. Thank you once again.

After all, it's literature—be it a short story, a children's story, a nursery rhyme, a simple poem, a chapter from a novel, a scene of a play, a one-act play, film adaptations, a literary or critical essay, a piece of creative nonfiction in auto/biography, travel literature or cultural studies—that students find interesting and appealing in their pursuit of knowledge and learning through language. Literature and the related are the best and most creative use of language that finds its most dynamic and ever-on-the-move motion in literature. Richard Poirier argues that literature is "one of the great human creations [...] the Olympics of talk and of writing" that "can productively mine and develop" the resource of language "more effectively than any other media."<sup>3</sup>

By being a medium that (according to Aristotle, Horace, Sidney, Shakespeare, Johnson, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and many others) teaches with pleasure and enlightens with delight, literature is a combination of entertainment and education, and joy and instruction, that provides both young and old with the opportunity of appreciating language at its finest. While contemporary utilitarian topics and trendiness of modern practical life should not be ignored and should in fact be viewed and dealt with for communicative and transactional purposes, literary *topos*, that is, *locus communis* or literary common places provide an equally, if not more,

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Poirier, "Venerable Complications," *Raritan: A Quarterly Review*, V. IV, No. 1 (Summer 1984), p. 12, 20, & 16.

effective source for developing rhetorical and persuasive arguments at a higher humanistic and historical, political and psychological, and cultural and intellectual level. Thus, simply stated: literature deserves a highly regarded place in first-year College English courses.

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